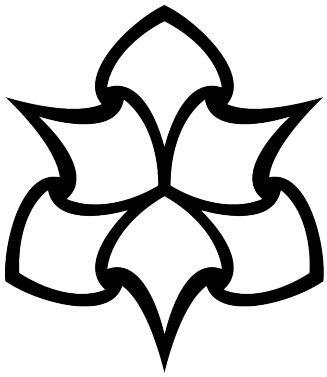

Patrimonial Dynamics and British Sports Coaching: A Century of Intangible Cultural Heritage

At the 2008 Olympics, Britain finished fourth in the medal table, winning nineteen gold medals, a performance unmatched since 1908 and an impressive turnaround from 1996 when Britain won a single gold and finished thirty-sixth. The 2012 London Olympics saw Britain move to third in the medal table and the Rio Games witnessed further progress as the British team rose to second, the first time that a host nation had managed to improve its standings at a subsequent Olympics. This upwards trajectory can be directly attributed to a change in the State's attitudes towards intervention in elite sport and to its decision in 1997 to invest heavily through the National Lottery. Since then more than 4,600 athletes have benefited, resulting in the winning of 633 Olympic and Paralympic medals.

These initiatives signalled a major shift in attitudes towards elite sport in Britain and marked the point at which many of its long-held traditions were finally discarded. This paper examines a significant component of these traditions, Britain's coaching heritage, and its relationship with amateurism, a key feature of the national sporting psyche and one that informed coaching discourses for over a century. This exploration not only provides a useful exemplar of the processes involved in studying cultural heritages but also exposes the role of patrimony in their evolution and consolidation. The peculiar development of British coaching can be directly attributable to the legacy left through the application of amateur values by a controlling sports elite that emerged in the late nineteenth century. Confident in their social and political status, this sporting aristocracy used its power and prestige to impose their own hegemonic version of acceptable sporting behaviour. The result was a long-lasting heritage in which the centrality of the volunteer coach, rather than the professional, and a focus on participation, rather than on performance, remained the dominant creeds for National Governing Bodies of sport throughout the twentieth century.

The paper draws on a variety of sources, including the oral testimonies of professional coaches, who reflect on the struggles they had contending with the accepted, but often unspoken, heritage of British coaching and the patrimonial dynamics of the organisations that employed them. Evidence from recent Olympic performances is presented to illustrate the change in British fortunes following State intervention, which signified a critical shift in influence from a patrimonial elite to a late-twentieth century bureaucracy, epitomised by the quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations ('quangos') established to resource elite performance. The argument presented here is that a dominant patrimony within late nineteenth-century British sport, who adhered strictly to amateur principles, were able to set the agenda for British coaching and that is was only in the 1990s, through bureaucratic rationalisation, that their control weakened and perspectives on this cultural heritage began to change. The paper further argues that, despite the innovations of the last twenty years, driven by a tightly prescribed government agenda emphasising targets and outcomes, the legacy of this heritage is so powerful that the volunteer remains the standard British coaching model.

Intangible Cultural Heritage

Heritage can be seen as the material or intangible result of a fundamentally fictitious past, serving the function of identity formation through the creation of a collective but selective memory. 'Heritage' indicates a mode of cultural production with reformative significance, a value-laden concept that is often represented by the notion of an inheritance bequeathed by previous generations to their successors. Heritage has traditionally been seen as being distinct from history and Lowenthal argued that rather than a critical inquiry into the past, heritage represents a celebration of it. Since 2000, there has been an upsurge of interest in Britain's sporting heritage, highlighted not only by a growth in the number of sports-related museums and statues but also in relevant literature, such as English Heritage's *Played in Britain* series, which charted the nation's sporting heritage through architecture and sportscapes, art, archaeology and artefacts. The variety of these artefacts is extensive, ranging from buildings to objects, documents and oral testimonies.

Heritage, then, represents a branch of cultural history in which narratives can be told in different ways and Harvey argues that heritage should be understood more as a process and a political and social construct than as 'present-minded' interpretations of physical artefacts. Just as historians have been criticised for an obsession with the written archive, heritage studies can sometimes appear to prioritise physical relics, but heritage is not restricted to the material reality of monuments, buildings, objects and accessories. It encompasses immaterial cultural heritage, a set of practices, expressions or representations that are acknowledged by a community as being part of its heritage. When visitors to heritage sites and museums were asked to define 'heritage', they highlighted notions of heritage as memory, workplace

skills, family histories, oral histories, or 'traditions', reinforcing Munjeri's belief that 'the tangible can only be interpreted through the intangible'. The concept of 'intangible heritage' emerged in the 1970s and the term itself was coined in 1982 at the UNESCO Mexico Conference. The 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage defined 'intangible cultural heritage' as the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, along with their associated instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces, that groups and individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage. These are transmitted from generation to generation, and constantly recreated by communities, providing them with a sense of identity and continuity. The Convention specified six types; oral traditions and expression, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship.

Patrimony and heritage

Understanding the historically contingent and embedded nature of heritage means engaging with debates about the production of identity, power and authority, including the impact of patrimony on cultural heritage. While 'patrimony' and 'patrimonial' are terms most often used in relation to property inherited from male ancestors they also relate to heritage, valued things passed down as a legacy from previous generations. A cultural-patrimony more specifically relates to objects possessing continuing cultural, traditional, or historical importance to the heritage of a group. Invoking cultural heritage is used by patrimonial elites to influence individuals and social groups through the selective creation, preservation, interpretation, and suppression of cultural narratives. Patrimonialism is a powerful form of elite privilege, one that allows its holders to achieve an autonomy that verges on autarky, the ability to appropriate resources from, and to exercise authority over, nonelites, an ongoing process, through which patrimonial elites seek to co-opt, undermine, or override potential alternatives. For Weber, patrimonialism is both dynamic and durable, features clearly discernible in the way that power and influence were exerted by the small patrimonial elite who established a hegemonic grip on British sport at the end of the nineteenth century and whose philosophies and attitudes left a long-lasting legacy on British coaching.

Sports Coaching and Amateurism as Intangible Cultural Heritages

The notion of an 'intangible cultural heritage' embraces the social activities that 'people practice as part of their daily lives' and sports coaching, it is argued here, represents an excellent example. It is a social practice that has been shaped by its cultural context and developments within coaching can be considered as a cultural response to wider public discourses and attitudes. Crucial to understanding Britain's coaching heritage is to appreciate how it was shaped by another intangible, amateurism, which was an active agent in determining the legacy and meaning of coaching as a social practice. Amateurism as a sporting ideology emerged during the mid-nineteenth century and subsequently dominated the administration of British sport, its values and structures playing a major role in shaping British cultural identity for over a century. As a philosophy for sporting behaviour it was zealously promoted by the social elite who ran British sport and when they established sporting bodies, they inculcated them with an ethical moral value system that stressed modesty, loyalty, self-restraint and sacrifice. In rejecting the excesses of professional sport, amateurs emphasised playing for the love of the game and lauded the gentleman all-rounder rather than the highly trained specialist. An aversion to specialisation and, by association, coaching, remained powerful among sporting elites with rugby union rules, for example, specifically forbidding clubs from employing a paid coach or trainer. These cultural attitudes had their roots in a class system that allowed a dominant patrimonial elite to dictate the way sport should be played and, ultimately, how coaching would be viewed across time and space.

A Century of British Coaching

British coaching has a long history reaching back to the beginning of the eighteenth century. As organised sports expanded and became more commercialised, the number of coaches increased so that by the mid-nineteenth century there was a large cohort of professionals operating across all sports. However, as a patrimonial elite graduated from the universities during the latter stages of the century their desire to extend their games into their post-university lives through the creation of associations led to a radical change in the sporting landscape as they structured their organisations and framed their sporting rules around their amateur ethos. Given the class obsessive world in which they operated, their powerful societal positions allowed them to impose this vision on all sports during the 1880s as more NGBs were created. Central to their rules was the exclusion of professionals, both as players and as coaches. In 1902, for

example, the Henley stewards resolved that no crew would be allowed to compete if they had been coached by a professional during the four weeks leading into their regatta. This hegemonic elite also dominated the British Olympic Committee, whose first six presidents and ten of its first thirteen chairpersons held aristocratic titles, an elitism reflected by the large number of university men in the track and field team at Stockholm in 1912. As one critic observed, 'Caste rules the world of athletes and all is snobbery...At present the whole tendency seems to be that only public school and university men shall have all the chances.'

At Stockholm, the only British athletics victories were in the 1,500 metres and the 400 metres relay, leading to an outcry at home where an anti-coaching rhetoric was evident in the condemnation of the professionalised coaching and training taking place in other countries. Athletic administrators remained convinced that their own preference for amateur rather than professional coaches, would ultimately ensure success. A.B. George argued that only amateur coaches had been responsible for any innovations in competitive sport and that the recruitment of internationals and Oxbridge Blues as coaches was critical since their experience inevitably qualified them to coach. Nevertheless, failures in Stockholm did stimulate a debate about coaching that challenged some of the key pillars of British sporting heritage. One *Times* correspondent argued that, while some believed that giving professional coaching to an amateur turned him into a professional, everyone outside the 'charmed circle of the public school' should have similar opportunities. The *Daily Express* proposed establishing an expert committee, independent of NGBs, to recommend athletes for coaching from professionals in dedicated training centres. These criticisms of both public school and NGB approaches to coaching suggest that it was generally acknowledged that it was within a certain social class that the intangible cultural heritages of British sport were most entrenched.

Inter-War Period

Perkin described inter-war society as being in a 'transitional stage, a sort of halfway house in which remnants of Victorianism…co-existed with harbingers of the future' and this appears to have been true of all aspects of social, cultural, political and economic life, including sport, where class dynamics continued to exert a powerful influence. Amateur administrators, who believed that Britain had little to learn from foreigners and that the British sportsman was inherently superior, continued to exclude professional coaches. For them, their way of playing sport, of seeing sportsmanship as a distinctively British characteristic, aided this conviction of national superiority. Consequently, amateur values concerning coaching and training continued to dominate, emphasising the power of resistance invested in British sport's patrimonial elite. Writing on rugby in 1927, W.W. Wakefield exposed many of the key concerns of the amateur elite about the direction of contemporary sport. As captain of Cambridge University, he had overseen the coaching of the 'Varsity team by a group of 'famous players', rather than by specialist coaches, and he was outspoken about the way sports were becoming more concerned with spectators than with players. Wakefield noted that the Rugby Union committee never considered the views of spectators and the only alterations in rules they ever made were those calculated to help players. For Wakefield, any deviation from this policy would mean the end of rugby as he knew it. 'Rugger' was a team game, and, though it should be played to win, the game must never be subordinated to the result, especially in Internationals, 'lest they should become gladiatorial contests rather than friendly trials of strength between two countries'. In his view, the growing tendency to individual glorification and an emphasis on 'results at all costs' must not be allowed to develop.

Swimming coaches like William Howcroft, who produced four of the six women on the 1920 Olympic team, were constantly faced with a difficult choice between amateurism and professionalism. As an amateur, Howcroft contributed to the national and regional organisation of swimming as a member of the Northern Counties Amateur Swimming Association executive and the Amateur Swimming Association council, but the reiteration in 1923 of the definition of an amateur as 'one who has never taught swimming for pecuniary gain', seems to have prompted him to review his status, despite his appointment as Olympic coach. In July 1924, he resigned all his positions because 'he was joining the professional ranks at the conclusion of the Olympic Games'. He subsequently became a swimming journalist and commentator, in which roles he frequently critiqued the state of British swimming. He contributed his own instructional texts and was active throughout the 1930s, coaching both Cambridge and Oxford universities simultaneously. British Olympian Joyce Cooper later described him as the best coach in the world, but, despite his expertise, Howcroft was not allowed any input into the administration of the sport from the moment he turned professional.

In athletics, some professional coaches continued to operate successfully, such as Cambridge University coach Alec Nelson, Oxford University coach Bill Thomas, and Harry Andrews, who accompanied the British team to Paris in 1924. However, the Amateur Athletic Association, who were concerned with 'exercise for the multitude, rather than competition for the specialist,' continued to focus their efforts on developing amateur coaches from their own social class, such as the several 'honorary' coaches who were offering to give lectures and demonstrations to clubs and schools in 1935. As keen amateurs and volunteers, 'no fee was to be charged for their services' and the composition of this list reflected the traditional profiles for amateur coaches in this period with representatives from educational institutions (49%), the armed forces, medicine, law and finance, as well as other middle-class occupations. For these men, coaching was a hobby and they lacked the resources and knowledge to be able to match their professional counterparts in America. In addition, many of them also acted as administrators, diluting further the time that they could devote to coaching. John Wadmore managed the 1928 Olympic Team in Amsterdam, where Denis Lyons acted as a referee, and Arthur Turk, oversaw the 1932 and 1936 Olympic teams. Although Britain won only two track gold medals in Berlin in 1936, much of the subsequent discourse praised the British approach to sport. Apologists for the British team argued that other nationalities employed different interpretations of amateurism and that 'our own particular amalgam of work and play expressed a better philosophy of life.' British athletes had competed as a 'gentleman' should, while foreign athletes 'kept by their governments' clearly had an advantage, having adopted practices incompatible with amateurism. Another writer observed that the definition of 'amateur' had always divided British and Continental opinion and Bevil Rudd praised the work of amateur coaches who 'nobly tackled the spade-work that an army of paid coaches undertake in America and on the Continent'.

Post-World War II

In the immediate post-1945 years, British administrators continued to focus their efforts on creating honorary coaches, rather than on developing Olympic athletes, and volunteer administrators associated with NGBs retained control over the direction of coaching. In many ways, amateurism acted as a form of nostalgia for an earlier age, highlighting how an intangible cultural heritage, through memory and received wisdom, can act as a powerful agent in perpetuating traditions and social practices. Despite significant changes in English society, amateurism continued to exercise a powerful grip over the practice and administration of British sport, even though there were continuing anxieties over the international competitiveness of British sportsmen and sportswomen. At the Helsinki Olympics, Britain's first gold medal came on the last day, leading critics to focus not only on the structures and financing of sport but on the more intangible aspects of the nation's heritage. A *Picture Post* correspondent, for example, declared that the only solution was to get rid of this 'absurd smugness about amateurism and have professional coaches all round'.

In fact, there had been some inadvertent coaching developments following the passing of the 1944 Education Act, which empowered a newly-created Ministry of Education to fund 80 per cent of the salaries of professional coaches appointed by NGBs. The AAA engaged Geoff Dyson in 1947, and Tony Chapman, Dennis Watts and Allan Malcolm in 1948, to produce 'professional and amateur coaches conforming to standards to be laid down by the AAA'. Reflecting the ongoing, and often implicit, influence of the voluntarist and amateur heritage, they were not employed to develop specialised coaching programmes for elite competitors. While a growing interest in the pursuit of excellence did emerge in the 1950s, any progress remained contingent on persuading those whose sporting lives had been dictated by their allegiance to Britain's intangible cultural heritages that they should compromise their attitudes, and this was always going to be difficult. In 1953, the AAA secretary, E.H.L. Clynes, observed that:

> The association is, however, not only concerned with champions but with the average young man who wishes merely to participate in a healthy outdoors recreation, to build up a fit body and mind, in the friendly company of other athletes. Too much emphasis cannot be given to the fact that amateur athletics is primarily and always a recreation. This is the foundation on which the association has been built, and the sole reason why thousands of old athletes are prepared to give voluntary service to the active members as honorary coaches, honorary administrators or club officials. Without this unpaid service amateur athletics could not exist.

Roger Bannister argued in 1955 against adopting Russian or American coaching systems and proposed that Britons should 'continue to be ourselves' because to 'regard sport as a hobby is surely more of a virtue than a vice.' British athletics team

manager, Les Truelove, referred to coaching as '90 per cent kidology' and expressed the view that he did 'not believe in coaching', a common attitude among amateur administrators and one that caused frequent disagreements between them and their national coaches. Speaking in 2012, Hamilton Smith, National Technical Officer for the ASA from 1963-1967, reflected on the 'aristocratic' and altruistic attitudes of amateur officials. There was an upper-class element controlling amateur sport and he believed that 'if you understood that relationship then everything was fine as long as you were positive and respectful.' However, if you questioned their authority or the way in which they managed the sport that is when 'problems arose.' Amateur officials 'recognised that they didn't know an awful lot' about the technical side of their sport, so they needed to appoint coaches, but administrators saw themselves as the 'masters' and the national coaches 'as a serf, a sort of creature.' It was unsurprising, then, that they were not willing to take direction from coaches. When Dyson suggested to Roland Harper that he should be called the 'Director of Coaching', Harper replied, 'Oh, the Coaching Committee would never agree to that, for we cannot be directed by anyone.'

Government attitudes and bureaucratic rationality

Effective challenges to the legacy left to British sport by the nineteenth-century patrimonial elite came not from coaches but from a more powerful influence, the government. In 1959, the Foreign Office acknowledged that the Olympics had 'immense prestige and offer a unique stage for the demonstration of national prowess', and a growing realisation of the potential benefits of international sporting prestige eventually persuaded the British government to intervene more directly in elite sport through a process of bureaucratic rationalisation. 'Rationalisation' refers to the replacement of traditions, values, and emotions as motivators for behaviour in society with concepts based on rationality and reason. Weber argued that bureaucracy constitutes the most efficient and rational way to organise human activity and that systematic processes and organised hierarchies are necessary to maintain order, maximise efficiency, and eliminate favouritism. Ostensibly, the patrimonial control of British sport, which had ensured that sports coaching as an intangible cultural heritage continued to follow traditional amateur precepts, became diluted as bureaucratic structures were imposed on it by the State. UK Sport, the government organisation responsible for directing the development of elite-level sport, was established in 1997 and authorised to distribute lottery funding. Terry Denison, who was on the coaching staff at six different Olympic Games, commented 'I remember we had a budget of £100,000 a year for British swimming, international swimming, once we got into Lottery funding that went up into the £2 million bracket so suddenly there was a whole different game'. While the former Sports Council concentrated on around 110 sports, UK Sport now focuses on around 30. It is supported in its efforts to develop elite coaches and athletes by National Institutes of Sport and by UK Coaching, which develops coaching pathways and oversees coaching awards. This underpins UK Sport's own elite coaching programme, which aims to 'enhance and develop current world class coaches'. The result of all these initiatives is that a new breed of elite coaches has been freed from patrimonial constraints and has little or no allegiance to Britain's intangible cultural heritage of coaching practice. Their input into the improvement in recent Olympic performances has been profound.

Britain and Olympics 2000-2016

While British participation in the Olympic Games was initially informed by the values and ethos of a late-nineteenth century patrimonial elite, the shift to bureaucratic rationalisation following government intervention has resulted in an entirely different approach. UK Sport has adopted a target driven agenda whereby sports are funded according to whether or not they achieve medal targets and the twenty-first century record of four Olympic sports, athletics, rowing, cycling and swimming, demonstrate this process quite clearly. Cycling has consistently exceeded its targets, and this is reflected in the continuous growth of its funding. Similarly, rowing met its targets up until Rio, although underperforming here has resulted in reduced funding for Tokyo. Athletics failed to meet its target in Beijing and so its funding fell for the following Olympic cycle while swimming failed to reach expectations for London and saw a significant reduction in funding for Rio. Exceeding their medal target in Rio has resulted in additional funding for Tokyo 2020. For seven Olympic sports who have no expectation of medal success, the future is bleak. Some funding was made available in 2008 to try and get them to a competitive level for 2012, when they would be entitled to compete as representatives of the host nation, and additional funding was granted for the London cycle. Their failure to make any impact, however, means that they no longer get elite funding support and they have been returned to the margins.

Despite criticisms of this level of expenditure, and of the whole process of rationalisation, there is no indication that the British government is prepared to abandon its commitment to achieving Olympic results. The focused investment of the last twenty years has resulted in a marked change in British fortunes and formal reviews of the elite sporting agenda in the wake of the Rio Games show no signs of deviating from the established template. Following a strategic review, UK Sport concluded that it would continue to focus on medal success in Olympic and Paralympic sports. The priority is to continue supporting every potential medal and medallist over a two Games period and only if finances allow will it consider investing in any other sports.

Conclusion

In a twentieth-century world consumed by concerns over national identity, sport quickly became a way of asserting national status, so it is not surprising that many countries industrialised their approaches to international competition, although British administrators resisted adopting practices such as professional coaching that they considered as being inconsistent with their sporting heritage. The powerful influence of the British class system was constantly reflected in the way in which amateur principles were applied by a patrimonial elite for whom voluntarism was an essential feature of their ethos and it is no surprise that the longevity of British class differences has been reflected in their ongoing influence in British sport. While intangible cultural heritages such as coaching practice are not immutable, they can be highly resistant to change, and the underpinning intangible of amateurism was so ingrained into the sporting culture that changes were always slow and highly contested. It was only when rugby union become a professional sport in 1995 that 'amateurism' as a sporting philosophy eventually loosened its grip on performance sport. Several factors contributed to this. An increasingly professionalised society began to reject the notion of the 'amateur', which soon became a derogatory term, and there was an accompanying decline in the number of world-class amateurs in sports like cricket. In addition, the media became increasingly critical of the failures of British teams and this put the question of coaching firmly in the public spotlight. The end result was that government involvement became acceptable and this led to increasing resources being devoted to coaching, particularly in the pursuit of Olympic success.

The achievement of a second place in the medal table in Rio had its roots in growing state intervention in sport and, most importantly, the availability of National Lottery funding, which brought with it much greater investment in elite coaches. In this respect, Britain finally joined other nations in its approach to sporting excellence and some of the outward vestiges of amateurism were removed. Where specialisation had previously been condemned, this was now admired, a view reflected in the rhetoric surrounding the bidding process for the London Games, which emphasised the concept of 'legacy' not only in terms of structures but also in terms of 'soft' outcomes such as future developments in coaching. The problem is that the intangible cultural heritage of coaching has become so deep-rooted in the British psyche that, despite the government interventions of the last twenty years that have encouraged a rationalised, outcome driven approach to elite sport, a continuing reliance on the volunteer has made it hard for professional coaching to establish itself as a worthwhile occupation.

In the first decade of this century, three-quarters of the estimated 1,109,000 British coaches were unpaid volunteers and there is no evidence that the rhetoric of 'soft' coaching legacies has significantly altered this cultural heritage of coaching practice. A 2017 survey found that nearly 14 million adults had coached sport or physical activity at some point in their lifetime with over 3 million having coached sport or physical activity in 2016. However, the vast majority coached less than three hours a week, mostly on a voluntary basis, and one in five did not coach on a regular weekly basis at all. Many coaches struggled to find opportunities to coach, while others found it hard to balance coaching commitments with their work and home life. The report concluded that there is a considerable disparity between the availability of coaches and employment opportunities. Any vision for a professional coaching future, therefore, may well be unachievable in a nation whose cultural coaching heritage remains rooted in the principles of amateurism and voluntarism as espoused by a late-nineteenth-century patrimonial elite. Similar studies of sports coaching in nations and continents where different patrimonial forces applied, and thus different intangible coaching heritages were created, would help to develop a deeper understanding of the cultural nature of sports coaching and the social/historical influences that impact on coaching practice.